

THE SUPERIORITY OF THE POOR MAN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayikra

The Superiority Of The Poor Man's Offering

The Torah writes in this week's parsha regarding the offering of the Korban Mincha: "*When a soul (nefesh) will bring a meal-offering to Hashem, his offering shall be of fine flour; he shall pour oil on it and place frankincense on it*" [Vayikra 2:1]. This is in contradistinction to the expression used at the start of the parsha in connection with the animal offerings: "*When a person (adam) from among you will bring an offering to Hashem from the animals...*" [Vayikra 1:2].

Rashi comments that by the Mincha flour offering, which is the least expensive of all sacrifices, the Torah uses the expression "*when a soul will bring*". This, Rashi says, is the only offering by which the Torah refers to the one who brings the korban as a nefesh (soul). Rashi explains that typically poor people bring flour offerings in lieu of more expensive animal sacrifices. The Almighty therefore emphasizes: "I give him credit as if he offered his soul."

A rich person pays \$1500 for an ox and slaughters it for the Mizbayach [altar]. The Torah says "very nice", but it is not the same as the flour offering of a poor person who may have paid \$3.50 for the combination of a little flour and a little oil. The poor person's offering is treated with greater respect, so to speak. Why is that?

Rav Elya Meir Bloch says the simple interpretation is that the \$1500 for the rich person may be a smaller percentage of his net worth or his disposable income than the much smaller amount spent by the poor person is, as a total of the latter's net worth or disposable income. Relatively speaking, the poor person made a larger contribution of his wealth than the rich person.

But, says Rav Elya Meir, this is not the correct way to interpret these pasukim [verses]. Rav Elya Meir sees a deeper interpretation.

The Ramban writes that when a person offers an animal sacrifice, he is really supposed to think that the slaughtered animal on the mizbayach should really be him. As it is with so many Mitzvos, the Torah desires one's heart, not just the hollow act of bringing a sacrifice. The Torah wants the intent of what he is doing to penetrate into the deepest recesses of a person's personality. The Torah is

interested in the person achieving the feeling of what bringing a korban is supposed to be about.

When a wealthy person plunks down his \$1500 for his offering, he has the attitude that "I certainly did my share. This animal cost me 1500 bucks! What more do You want?" Therefore, he lacks the requisite humility appropriate for one who is supposed to be seeking atonement. But the poor man knows that all he is bringing is a minimal korban - a little flour, a little oil. He knows that he does not earn atonement for \$3.50. He understands that his offering is just symbolic and is supposed to represent a deeper emotion that emerges from the recesses of his soul. He puts his heart and soul into the offering because he clearly realizes that it is not the flour and the oil that will gain him atonement.

When a person is poor and can not afford to buy his way out of his iniquity, the only thing he has going for him is his nefesh - his soul. Therefore, he puts his heart and soul into the offering. The Torah highlights this idea by the use of the word nefesh in connection with the flour offering.

Aharon Was A Kiruv Worker Who Did Not Compromise On His Principles

The Torah further states regarding the flour offering "*He shall bring it to the sons of Aharon, the Kohanim...*" [Vayikra 2:2]. The Medrash Rabbah quotes the pasuk [verse]: "*The teaching of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and with fairness, and turned many away from iniquity.*" [Malachi 2:6]. This pasuk describes the quintessential priest. The prophet Malachi contrasts the Kohanim who served in his time who had less than sterling character with the ideal Kohain. Chazal say that the ideal Kohen whom Malachi is describing was the Priest of all Priests - Aharon haKohen.

The Medrash elaborates on the expression "the teaching of truth was in his mouth...and he turned many away from iniquity" as meaning "he did not forbid that which was permitted and he did not permit that which was forbidden." He always told it like it was. "And turned many away from iniquity". Aharon was a "kiruv worker". He brought people back to Torah and religion.

Avos D'Rabbi Nasan elaborates: When Aharon would meet someone in the street; he would be kind to them and greet them cheerfully. The next day, when that person would contemplate doing something wrong, he would ask himself "how could I disappoint Aharon the Kohen?" This was Aharon's approach to "outreach" (kiruv).

People have the tendency to say that when they are trying to "bring people back," perhaps the rules can be bent. Perhaps we can compromise on what the halacha is in order to achieve better results in kiruv. The above-cited Medrash alludes to this issue. Aharon was extremely successful at drawing near distant members of the flock. "He loved G-d's creatures and he drew them near to Torah." [Pirkei Avos 1:12] When he died, we read that "*all the house of Israel*" mourned him. [Bamidbar 20:29] There was greater mourning for him than even for his brother Moshe. He was beloved by the people. People simply could not bring themselves to do any wrong in his presence.

The pasuk we quoted from Malachi says about Aharon *"no injustice (avlah) was ever found on his lips"*. I once heard that the implicit praise in this expression was that Aharon never had to bawl anyone out. He never had to chastise anyone or yell at them. There was never a mean word that came out of his mouth. How then was it that he was successful? How was he able to help people turn away from iniquity? The answer was that his persona was so sweet and so endearing that people refused to let themselves offend him by sinning. They simply could not do it to him.

But the first statement of the pasuk in Malachi is that *"The teaching of truth (Toras emes) was in his mouth"*. He never bent the rules. That is why the Medrash needs to tell us that he did not forbid that which was permitted and he did not permit that which was forbidden. What kind of praise is that? The answer is that when a person is in such a position and is trying to draw people near to Judaism, the evil inclination to bend the rules a bit and to compromise is very strong. In fact, in many situations, rules are bent and things are not done the way they are supposed to be done.

Aharon was a very successful kiruv worker, but he was successful because of the fact that Toras emes was in his mouth - he did NOT bend the rules. He refused to permit that which was forbidden or to forbid that which was permitted.

Defeating the Purpose

The Ramban speaks about the "secret of sacrifices" in this week's parsha. He writes that a person can sin through thought, speech, or action, and that the act of bringing a sacrifice has corresponding components. One places his hands upon the head of the animal (semicha) to correspond to the sinful action he did; he verbally confesses his sin to correspond to sinful speech; and he watches it burn in the fire to correspond to his sinful thoughts.

The act of bringing a sacrifice is the ultimate act of submission. A person admits: "Truly, I have done wrong. I have disobeyed the Master of the Universe. I have not listened to Your word. I am the one who deserves to be brought on this altar." These are the thoughts that should be in a person's mind when he brings his korban -- that he has sinned to Him with his body and soul. "There on the altar -- but for the Grace of G-d -- go I."

In a Jewish leap year, Parshas Vayikra coincides with Shabbos Parshas Zachor . [Devorim 25:17-19]. The corresponding Haftarah is from Sefer Shmuel [Samuel I 15:1-34]. The prophet Samuel commands King Saul to destroy Amalek: *"Destroy everything he has, have no pity on him, kill man and woman alike, infant and suckling alike, ox and sheep alike, camel and donkey alike."* [pasuk 3]. But we are told in pasuk 9: *"Saul and the people took pity on Agag, on the best of the sheep and cattle, the fatted bulls and the fatted sheep, and on all that was good..."*

When Shmuel approached Saul and asked him what was the noise of cattle he was hearing, Saul excused himself by saying the animals were spared in order that they might be slaughtered *"to Hashem your G-d."* In other words, King Saul argued "I am only doing it for You, Master of the Universe. What could be a bigger sanctification of Your Name than offering sacrifices from these

prime head of cattle?" Samuel responded with searing words (pasuk 22): *"Does Hashem delight in elevation-offerings and feast-offerings as much as in obedience to the voice of Hashem? Behold, to obey is better than a choice offering, to be attentive than the fat of rams."*

G-d wants us to listen, to obey. There was great irony in Saul's excuse. The whole purpose of bringing sacrifices is because we have NOT listened; we have NOT obeyed properly. How shallow and meaningless are Saul's words to the prophet, "I have saved the animals in order to bring sacrifices"? He had it all backwards! It is better to listen in the first place and not need to bring a sacrifice, than to not listen to G-d's words (to kill all the animals) and to pride oneself in his willingness to bring sacrifices. One should bring his offerings out of a feeling of subservience, not out of a motive that "I have a better idea than what G-d commanded."

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